

House Education & the Workforce Committee

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FACT SHEET

Bush Testing Plan Measures Results, Empowers Parents

Americans strongly support President Bush's education plan, *No Child Left Behind*, his innovative approach to improving the quality of our education system, and regular testing to ensure accountability is the centerpiece of that plan

Why ask states and schools to annually test students in grades 3-8 in reading and math?

- States and schools using federal education dollars must be held accountable for results.
- Parents have the right to know whether their children are truly learning.
- The only way for parents to know for certain whether their children are learning is to measure, and measure regularly.
- Testing less frequently than every year does not provide sufficient information to enable schools and teachers to make adjustments in the student's instructional program to get them back on track.

The American people support the Bush plan to test students and empower parents.

- A new poll of 800 registered voters by the Winston Group, a widely respected GOP national polling firm, shows that Americans strongly support President Bush's plan to ask states to design and implement annual math and reading tests for students in grades three through eight.
- According to the poll, 72 percent of the respondents supported the Bush testing plan and just 23 percent opposed it. Moreover, the Bush proposal is widely supported across the political ideological spectrum. It is supported by liberals by a 66-29 percent margin and by moderates by a 70-25 percent margin. **Of note, conservatives supported the testing plan by a large margin of 80-16 percent.**

Does H.R. 1 create a national test in reading and math for grades three through eight?

- No. States will select the test that best suits their needs. The federal government will provide funding for states that do not have annual assessments to develop such assessments within three years.
- This provision is simply a requirement to ensure that precious taxpayer dollars are not wasted on programs that don't work. The best way to ensure this, without imposing a set of federal mandates, is by simply asking states to show annual results on the core academic basics of math and reading.

Does the Bush testing plan impose a financial burden on states?

- This is not an unfunded federal mandate. The bill authorizes \$400 million to help states develop effective systems of standards and assessments.
- Assessments of student performance are not new to the ESEA. The 1994 reauthorization was the first to include a requirement that states develop regular systems of assessment linked to state standards.
- President Bush's *No Child Left Behind* bill just happens to be the first time since then that a President has offered to support state development costs.

States already tests kids. Does this mean new or additional tests on top of what students are already take?

- As part of the 1994 reauthorization, states were required to develop and implement their own content standards, performance standards, and aligned assessments in reading and math. Specifically, the 1994 law required states to have a system in place to administer their state assessments at least once in each of three grade spans (3-5, 6-9, and 10-12) by the 2000-2001 school year. The Bush proposal builds on the 1994 law by giving states until the 2004-2005 school year to develop and implement state assessments to measure progress annually in grades 3-8 in reading and math.
- As in the past, the assessments would continue to be selected by the states and local school districts -- not the federal government -- and they would be flexible enough to be met by current statewide tests. In so doing, this new tool will help improve instruction and learning by focusing on outputs -- year to year progress in student achievement -- instead of inputs such as dollars, teachers, or textbooks.

Why do states participate in an annual “second snapshot” assessment under H.R. 1, such as the NAEP assessment or another assessment selected by the state?

- Under H.R. 1, a state’s improvement in academic achievement is measured in terms of its annual assessments, but for the purpose of sanctions and rewards, a “second snapshot” is taken with the state National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), or another assessment selected for this purpose by a state.
- In other words, states that show significant progress on their own state exam will also need to show progress on either the fourth and eighth grade NAEP assessments or another assessment selected by the state meeting widely recognized professional and technical standards in order to receive rewards for improving academic achievement. These tests will only be used to shed light on state assessment results -- neither sanctions nor rewards will be determined solely by the results.

Does H.R. 1 establish a national testing in general?

- No. H.R. 1 prohibits federally sponsored national testing, federally controlled curriculum, as well as any mandatory national teacher test or certification.

A recent National Association of State Boards (NASBE) study suggested that President Bush’s proposal to test every student in grades 3-8 could cost states as much as \$7 billion over the next seven years? Is this true?

- The study assumes no state has any assessment system in place. This is simply false. In effect, NASBE is selling its own state members short.
- The cost estimates are high -- not just because they ignore the states that already have sunk costs in assessments systems that are in compliance or on their way to compliance (which by the way includes some of the most populous states in the country like Florida, Texas, and California) and therefore have almost no additional development or administration costs as a result of ESEA -- but also because they inflated the numbers.
- On administration, for example, while schools may have varying levels of efficiency in administering exams, we know that in Houston, administration of the Stanford 9 -- which the district did at its option for every child in the district -- cost less than \$10 per pupil to administer. The NASBE study gives a \$25-50 estimate for administration that is 2.5 times higher than what we know administration can cost.

Don’t states already spend enough on testing, and does the Bush plan exacerbate this problem?

- How much do states spend to assess student learning? The answer is only a fraction of what the U.S. invests in K-12 education.
- In 1999-2000, the 50 states spent \$422.2 million on testing out of total education expenditures of \$307.3 billion. That means for every \$1,000 spent on education, just \$1.37 went to testing.

Washington has spent nearly \$130 billion since 1965 -- and more than \$80 billion in the past decade alone -- in an unsuccessful effort to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers. Regular testing to ensure accountability is the centerpiece of the President's education plan. **How much longer will Washington spend education dollars without insisting on results, without putting children first and parents in charge?**